

Notes for Introductory Remarks at the  
Inter Academy Council Workshop  
on Strategy and Mechanisms

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It is a great pleasure to welcome such a distinguished group of participants and to thank the Inter Academy Council for organizing this workshop on Strategy and Mechanisms to follow up on its report "Inventing a Better Future". We are honoured that the IAC has asked IDRC to work closely with them on issues of such importance.

Canada's International Development Research Centre was established in 1970 to help strengthen capacity for research and innovation in developing countries. Our basic premise has always been that a country can develop only when it has the capacity to use science to address its own problems and to make decisions, often with respect to policy and resource allocation, on the basis of locally relevant evidence.

Our support to capacity building has usually meant providing Southern researchers with the resources to undertake research themselves so as to contribute practical solutions to their own countries' development challenges. And, of course, to learn by doing in the process. We have also had more formal elements of training and institution building, but the key has been to empower Southern scientists to do the work themselves and to do so in the context of application. This still seems to me to be of cardinal importance.

When appropriate — and often when requested by our Southern partners — we have also sponsored collaborative research between Southern and Canadian scientists. In Canada, as in a number of other industrialized countries, we are at present actively exploring how to make the link between domestic S&T capacity and development assistance in a way that is of maximum benefit to our Southern partners, in terms of research results and capacity building.

In Canada, this is primarily the responsibility of the National Science Advisor, Dr. Arthur Carty. I am delighted that he is here with us. We feel that the IAC's preoccupation with ensuring greater collaboration between science and development assistance is one that must be addressed by all countries.

This workshop provides us with an opportunity to build on past lessons from capacity building and to factor them into the future agenda. Our own learning confirms:

Firstly, the paramount importance of a domestic science and technology capacity in all societies. They must control their own “knowledge-based” development. They must be prepared to invest in sustainable capacity.

Secondly, the necessity that external efforts to build S&T capacity be responsive to clearly articulated needs expressed by each country. Support must be tailored to these needs and conditions.

Thirdly, that, within a framework determined by each country, external actors must coordinate their efforts more effectively.

Fourthly, that social, scientific, and technical innovation must go hand in hand if societies are to reap the benefits from S&T.

Let me reiterate my pleasure in being here today, and in being engaged with you all in Inventing a Better Future.